

JESUS DECLINING THE LEGIONS

NO. 1955

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 27, 1887,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"Think you that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? but how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"
Matthew 26:53-54.*

IT is the garden of Gethsemane. Here stands our Lord, and yonder is the betrayer. He is foremost of the multitude. You know his face, the face of that son of perdition, even Judas Iscariot. He comes forward, leaving the men with the staves, and the swords, and the torches, and lanterns, and He proceeds to kiss his Master. It is the token by which the officers are to know their victim.

You perceive at once that the disciples are excited. One of them cries, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" Their love to their Master has overcome their prudence. There are but eleven of them, a small band to fight against the cohort sent by the authorities to arrest their Master, but love makes no reckoning of odds. Before an answer can be given, Peter has struck the first blow, and the servant of the high priest has narrowly escaped having his head split in two—as it is, his ear is cut off.

One is not altogether surprised at Peter's act, for, in addition to his headlong zeal, he had most likely misunderstood the saying of his Lord at supper—"He that has no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." There was not time for our Lord to explain, and they were so accustomed to His concrete style of speech, that they should not have misunderstood Him, but they did so. He had simply told them that the days of peace, in which they could go in and out among the people, and be joyfully received by them, had now come to an end. For as He Himself, who had once been in favor with all the people, would now be "reckoned among the transgressors" (see Luk 22:35-38), so would they be counted among the offscouring of all things.

Now they could no longer reckon on the hospitality of a friendly people, but must carry their own purse and scrip. And instead of feeling safe, wherever they went, they must understand that they were in an enemy's country, and must travel through the world like men armed for self-defense. They were now to use their own substance, and not to hope for cheerful entertainment among a grateful people. And they would need to be on their guard against those who in killing them would think that they were doing God service.

They took His language literally, and therefore replied, "Lord, behold, here are two swords." I think He must have smiled sadly at their blunder as He answered, "It is enough." He could never have thought of their fighting that He might not be delivered unto the Jews, since for that purpose two swords were simply ridiculous. They had missed His meaning, which was simply to warn them of the changed circumstances of His cause, but they caught at the words which He had used, and exhibited their two swords.

Possibly, as some have supposed, these were two long sacrificial knives with which they had killed the Paschal lamb, but indeed, the wearing of weapons is much more general in the East than with us. Our Lord's disciples were largely Galileans, and as the Galileans were more of a fighting sort than other Jews, the wearing of swords was probably very general among them. However, two of the apostles had swords, not that they were fighting men, but probably because it was the fashion of their country, and they had thought it needful to wear them when passing through a dangerous district.

At any rate, Peter had a sword, and instantly used it. He smites the first man he could reach. I wonder he had not struck Judas—one might have excused him if he had, but it is a servant of the high priest who bears the blow and loses his ear.

Then the Savior comes forward in all His gentleness, as self-possessed as when He was at supper, as calm as if He had not already passed through an agony. Quietly He says, “Suffer it to be so now,” He touches the ear, and heals it, and in the lull which followed, when even the men that came to seize Him were spell-bound by this wondrous miracle of mercy, He propounds the great truth, that they that take the sword shall perish with the sword, and bids Peter put away his weapon. Then He utters these memorable words, “Think you that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? but how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” And He also said what John alone appears to have heard—“The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?” (Joh 18:11).

The wound of Malchus served a gracious purpose, for it enabled our Lord to work a new miracle, the likes of which He had never wrought before, namely, the restoration of a member maimed or cut off by violence. The blunder of the apostles was also overruled to answer a very instructive purpose. You wonder that the Lord should, even in appearance, encourage His disciples to have swords, and then forbid them to use them. Follow me in a thought which is clear to my own mind.

For a man to abstain from using force when he has none to use is no great virtue. It reminds one of the lines of Cowper’s ballad—

*“Stooping down, as needs he must
Who cannot sit upright.”*

But for a man to have force ready to his hand, and then to abstain from using it, is a case of self-restraint, and possibly of self-sacrifice, of a far nobler kind. Our Savior had His sword at His side that night, though He did not use it.

“What!” say you, “how can that be true?” Our Lord says, “Can I not now pray to my Father, and he will give me twelve legions of angels?” Our Lord had thus the means of self-defense—something far more powerful than a sword hung at His girdle, but He refused to employ the power within His reach. His servants could not bear this test. They had no self-restraint, the hand of Peter is on his sword at once.

The failure of the servants in this matter seems to me to illustrate the grand self-possession of their Master. “Alas,” He seems to say, “you cannot be trusted even with swords, much less could you be entrusted with greater forces. If you had the angelic bands at your command, down they would come streaming from the sky to execute works of vengeance, and so mar My great life-work of love.”

Brethren, we are better without swords and other forms of force than with them, for we have not yet learned, like our Lord, to control ourselves. Admire the glorious self-restraint of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, armed not with a sword but with the embattled hosts of “helmed cherubim and sworded seraphim,” yet refused even by a prayer to bring them down to His relief. Peter’s passionate use of the sword illustrates the happy self-control of His Lord, and this is the use of the incident.

Let us now proceed to learn from the words of the Lord Jesus which we have selected as our text.

I. First, brethren, I would have you notice from the text OUR LORD’S GRAND RESOURCE.

“Think you that I cannot now pray to my Father?” Our Lord is surrounded by His adversaries, and there are none about Him powerful enough to defend Him from their malice—what can He do? He says, “I can pray to my Father.” This is our Lord’s continual resource in the time of danger, yea, even in that time of which He said, “This is your hour and the power of darkness.” He can even now pray to His Father.

First, Jesus had no possessions on earth, but *He had a Father*. I rejoice in His saying, “Think you that I cannot now pray to my Father?” He is a betrayed man. He is given up into the hands of those who thirst for His blood, but He has a Father almighty and divine. If our Lord had merely meant to say that

God could deliver Him, He might have said, “Do you think not that I can pray to JEHOVAH?” or “to God?” But He uses the sweet expression, “My Father,” both here and in that text in John, where He says, “The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?”

O brethren, remember that we have a Father in heaven. When all is gone and spent, we can say, “Our Father.” Relatives are dead, but our Father lives. Supposed friends have left us, even as the swallows quit in our wintry weather—but we are not alone, for the Father is with us. Cling to that blessed text, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come unto you.” In every moment of distress, anxiety, perplexity, we have a Father in whose wisdom, truth, and power, we can rely.

Your dear children do not trouble themselves much, do they? If they have a want, they go to father; if they are puzzled, they ask father; if they are ill-treated, they appeal to father. If but a thorn is in their finger, they run to mother for relief. Be it little or great, the child’s sorrow is the parent’s care. This makes a child’s life easy. It would make ours easy if we would but act as children towards God. Let us imitate the Elder Brother, and when we, too, are in our Gethsemane, let us, as He did, continue to cry, “My Father, My Father.” This is a better defense than shield or sword.

Our Lord’s resource was to approach His Father with prevailing prayer. “Can I not now pray to my Father?” Our Lord Jesus could use that marvelous weapon of All-prayer, which is shield, and sword, and spear, and helmet, and breast-plate, all in one. When you can do nothing else you can pray. If you can do many things besides, it will still be your wisdom to say, “Let us pray!”

But I think I hear you object, that our Lord had been praying, and yet His griefs were not removed. He had prayed Himself into a bloody sweat with prayer, and yet He was left unprotected, to fall into His enemies’ hands. This is true, and yet it is not all the truth, for He had been strengthened, and power for deliverance was at His disposal. He had only to press His suit to be rescued at once. The Greek word here is not the same word which would set forth ordinary prayer; the Revised Version puts it, “Think you that I cannot *beseech* my Father?”

We make a great mistake if we throw all prayer into one category, and think that every form of true prayer is alike. We may pray and plead, and even do this with extreme earnestness, and yet we may not use that mode of beseeching which would surely bring the blessing. Hitherto our Lord had prayed, and prayed intensely, too, but there was yet a higher form of prayer to which He might have mounted if it had been proper to do so. He could so have besought that the Father must have answered, but He would not.

O brethren, you have prayed a great deal, perhaps, about your trouble, but there is a reserve force of beseeching in you yet—by the aid of the Spirit of God you may pray after a higher and more prevailing rate. This is a far better weapon than a sword. I was speaking to a brother yesterday about a prayer which my Lord had remarkably answered in my own case, and I could not help saying to him, “But I cannot always pray in that fashion. Not only can I not so pray, but I would not dare to do so even if I could.”

Moved by the Spirit of God, we sometimes pray with a power of faith which can never fail at the mercy seat, but without such an impulse we must not push our own wills to the front. There are many occasions upon which, if one had all the faith which could move mountains, he would most wisely show it by saying nothing beyond, “Nevertheless not as I will, but as you will.” Had our Lord chosen to do so, He had still in reserve a prayer power which would have effectually saved Him from His enemies. He did not think it right to use it, but He could have done so had He pleased.

Notice that our Lord, *felt that He could even then pray.* Matters had not gone too far for prayer. When can they do so? The word “now” practically occurs twice in our version, for we get it first as “now,” and then as “presently.” It occurs only once in the original, but as its exact position in the verse cannot easily be decided, our translators, with a singular wisdom, have placed it in both the former and the latter part of the sentence. Our Savior certainly meant—“I am come now to extremities; the people are far away whose favor formerly protected Me from the Pharisees, and I am about to be seized by armed men, but even now I can pray to my Father.”

Prayer is an ever open door. There is no predicament in which we cannot pray. If we follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes, we can now pray effectually unto our Father, even as He could have done. Do I hear you say, "The fatal hour is near"? You may now pray. "But the danger is imminent!" You may now pray. If, like Jonah, you are now at the bottom of the mountains, and the weeds are wrapped about your head, you may even now pray. Prayer is a weapon that is usable in every position in the hour of conflict.

The Greeks had long spears, and these were of grand service to the phalanx so long as the rank was not broken, but the Romans used a short sword, and that was a far more effectual weapon at close quarters. Prayer is both the long spear and the short sword. Yes, brother, between the jaws of the lion you may even now pray. We glory in our blessed Master that He knew in fullness of faith that if He would bring forth His full power of prayer He could set all heaven on the wing. As soon as His beseeching prayer had reached the Father's ear, immediately, like flames of fire, angels would flash death upon His adversaries.

Our Lord's resort was not to the carnal weapon, but to the mighty engine of supplication. Behold, my brethren, where our grand resort must always be. Look not to the arm of flesh, but to the Lord our God. Church of God, look not piteously to the State, but fly to the mercy seat. Church of God, look not to the ministry, but resort to the throne of grace. Church of God, depend not upon learned or moneyed men, but beseech God in supplicating faith. Prayer is the tower of David built for an armory. Prayer is our battle-axe and weapons of war. We say to our antagonist, "Think you that I cannot now pray to my Father." Let this suffice to display our Savior's grand resource in the night of His direst distress.

II. Secondly, let me invite your attention to OUR LORD'S UNDIMINISHED POWER IN HEAVEN at the time when He seemed to have no power on earth.

He says when about to be bound and taken away to Caiaphas, "I can presently call down twelve legions of angels from the skies." He had influence in heaven with the Father, the great Lord of angels. He could have of the Father all that the Father possessed. Heaven would be emptied if needful to satisfy the wish of the Beloved Son. The man Christ Jesus who is about to be hung upon the cross has such power with the Father that He has but to ask and to have.

The Father would answer Him at once, "He shall *presently* send me twelve legions of angels." There would be no delay, no hesitation. The Father was ready to help Him, waiting to deliver Him. All heaven was concerned about Him. All the angelic bands were waiting on the wing, and Jesus had but to express the desire, and instantly the garden of Gethsemane would have been as populous with shining ones as the New Jerusalem itself.

Our Lord speaks of angels that His Father would give Him, or send Him. We may interpret it that the Father would at once put at His disposal the glorious inhabitants of heaven. Think of seraphs at the disposal of the Man of Sorrows! He is despised and rejected of men, and yet angels that excel in strength are at His beck and call. Swift of wing, and quick of hand, and wise of thought, they are charmed to be the messengers of the Son of Man, the servitors of Jesus. Think of this, beloved, when you bow before the thorn-crowned head, and when you gaze upon the nailed hands and feet. Remember that angels and principalities and powers, and all the ranks of pure spirits by whatsoever name they are named, were all at the beck of Jesus when He was newly risen from His agony, and was about to be led away bound, to the High priest. He is our Lord and God, even at His lowest and weakest.

Jesus speaks of "twelve legions." I suppose He mentions the number twelve as a legion for each one of the eleven disciples and for Himself. They were only twelve, and yet the innumerable hosts of heaven would make forced marches for their rescue. A legion in the Roman army was six thousand men at the very lowest. Twelve times six thousand angels would come in answer to a wish from Jesus. Nay, He says, "more" than twelve legions. There can be no limit to the available resources of the Christ of God. Thousands of thousands would fill the air if Jesus willed it. The band that Judas led would be an insignificant squad to be swallowed up at once if the Savior would but summon His allies.

Behold, dear brethren, the glory of our betrayed and arrested Lord. If He was such then, what is He now, when all power is given Him of His Father! Bear in your minds the clear idea that Jesus in His humiliation was nevertheless Lord of all things, and especially of the unseen world, and of the armies which people it. The more clearly you perceive this, the more you will admire the all-conquering, all-abjuring love which took Him to the death of the cross.

Tarry here just a minute to remember that the angels also are, according to your measure and degree, at your call. You have but to pray to God and angels shall bear you up in their hands lest you dash your foot against a stone. We do not think enough of these heavenly beings, yet are they all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those that are heirs of salvation.

Like Elijah's servant, if your eyes were opened you would see the mountain full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about the servants of God. Let us learn from our Master to reckon upon forces invisible. Let us not trust in that which is seen of the eye, and heard of the ear, but let us have respect to spiritual agencies which evade the senses, but are known to faith.

Angels play a far greater part in the affairs of providence than we know of. God can raise us up friends on earth, but if He does not do so He can find us abler friends in heaven. There is no need to pluck out the sword with which to cut off men's ears, for infinitely better agencies will work for us. Have faith in God, and all things shall work for your good. The angels of God think it an honor and a delight to protect the least of His children.

III. But I cannot linger, although I feel a great temptation to do so. My text is full of teaching, but a main point is the third one—OUR LORD'S PERFECT WILLINGNESS IN SUFFERING.

I hope I have already brought that before you. Our Lord would be betrayed into the hands of sinners, but He would go with them willingly. He had not shunned the garden though Judas knew the place. No part of our Lord's sufferings came upon Him by the necessity of His nature. Neither as God nor as sinless man was He bound to suffer. There was no necessity that Christ should endure any of the inflictions laid upon Him, except the necessity of His fulfilling the Scriptures, and performing the work of mercy which He came to do.

He must die because He became the great sacrifice for sin, but apart from that, no necessity of death was on Him. They scourged Him, but they could not have lifted the thong if He had not permitted it. He thirsted on the cruel tree, but all the springs of water in the world He makes and fills, and therefore He needed not to have thirsted if He had not chosen to submit thereto.

When He died, He did not die through the failure of His natural strength. He died because He had surrendered Himself to death as our great Propitiation. Even in His expiring moment our Lord cried with a loud voice, to show that His life was in Him still. He "gave up the ghost," freely parting with a life which He might have retained. He voluntarily surrendered His spirit to God. It was not snatched from Him by a force superior to His own will. He willingly bore our sins, and willingly died as our Substitute. Let us love and bless the willing Sufferer.

Indeed, our Lord was not merely submissive to the divine will, but if I may use words in a paradoxical manner, I would say that He was actively submissive. A single prayer would have brought our Lord deliverance from His enemies, but He exercised force upon Himself, and held in His natural impulse to beseech the Father. He held in abeyance that noblest of spiritual gifts, that choicest of all forms of power—the power of prayer. One would have thought that a good man might always exercise prayer to the full of his bent, and yet Jesus laid His hand upon His prayer power as if it had been a sword, and put it back into its sheath.

"He saved others, himself he could not save." He prayed for others, but, in this instance, for Himself He would not pray, as He might have done. He would do nothing, even though it were to pray a prayer which even in the slightest degree would oppose the will of the Father. He was so perfectly submissive, yea, so eager to accomplish our salvation, that He would not pray to avoid the cruelty of His enemies and the bitterness of death. He sees it is the Father's will, and therefore He will not have a wish in opposition to it. "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

Remember, that He needed not to commit any wrong thing to prevent His being taken and slain. A good thing, namely, a prayer, would do it, but He will not pray. He has undertaken the work of redemption, and He must and will go through with it. He has such a desire for your salvation and for mine, such a thirst to honor and glorify His Father in the work which He had engaged to do, that He will not even prevent His sufferings by a prayer.

Wonderful is that question, "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled?" It is as much as to say, "Who else can drink that cup? Who else can tread the winepress of Almighty wrath? No, I must do it. I cannot lay this load upon any other shoulders." Therefore, for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame. He was willing, ay, willing from beginning to end, to be our suffering Savior. He was willing to be born at Bethlehem, to work at Nazareth, to be mocked at Jerusalem, and at last to die at Calvary. At any one point He could have drawn back. No constraint was upon Him but that of a love stronger than death.

I want you, dear hearers, to draw the inference that Jesus is willing to save. A willing Sufferer must be a willing Savior. If He willingly died, He must with equal willingness be ready to give to us the fruit of His death. If any of you would have Jesus, you may surely have Him at once. He freely delivered Himself up for us all. If He was so willing to become a sacrifice, how willing must He be that the glorious result of His sacrifice should be shared in by you and by all who come to God by Him! If there be unwillingness anywhere, you are unwilling. He rejoices to be gracious.

I wish the charm of this truth would affect your heart as it does mine. I love Him greatly, because I see that at any moment He might have drawn back from redeeming me, and yet He would not. A single prayer would have set Him free, but He would not pray it, for He loved us so!

*"This was compassion like a God,
That when the Savior knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew."*

Do not grieve Him by thinking that He is unwilling to forgive, that He is unwilling to receive a sinner such as you. Has He not said, "Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out"? You will delight Him if you come to Him, whoever you may be. If you will but draw near to Him by simple trust, He will see in you the purchase of His agony, and all the merit of His death shall flow out freely to you. Come and welcome, sinner, come.

IV. Now I must lead you, with great brevity, to notice OUR LORD'S GREAT RESPECT FOR HOLY SCRIPTURE.

He can have twelve legions of angels but "how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"

Notice that our Lord believed in *the divinity of Scripture*. He says, "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled?" But if the Scriptures are only the writings of men, there is no necessity that they should be fulfilled. If they are merely the fallible utterances of good men, I see no particular necessity that they should be fulfilled. Our Lord Jesus Christ insisted upon it that the Scriptures must be fulfilled, and the reason was that they are not the word of man, but the Word of God.

The Scriptures were evidently the Word of God to our Lord Jesus Christ. He never trifles with them, nor differs from them, nor predicts that they will vanish. It is He that says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled."

He believed in the divine origin of the Scriptures and also in *their infallibility*. "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" He does not hint that the Scriptures might be a little mistaken. He does not argue, "I will bring the twelve legions of angels down to deliver Myself, and it is no matter to Me that then the Scriptures will be made void." Oh, no! The Scriptures must be true, and

they must be fulfilled, and therefore He must be betrayed into the hands of men. He settles it as a matter of necessity that Scripture must infallibly be verified, even to its jots and tittles.

See, brethren, *the priceless worth* of Scripture in the estimation of our Lord. In effect He says, "I will die rather than any Scripture shall be unfulfilled. I will go to the cross rather than any one word of God should not be carried out." The prophet Zechariah has written, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, says the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad." The fulfillment of that prophecy fell due that night, and the Son of God was prepared to be smitten as the Shepherd of the sheep, rather than the Word of the Father should fall to the ground. Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has he will give for his life, but Jesus would give His life for the Scriptures.

Brethren, it were worthwhile for the whole church to die rather than any truth of Scripture should be given up. Let all our thousands be consumed upon the altar as one great holocaust sooner than the Scriptures should be dishonored. The Word of the Lord must live and prevail whether we die or not. Our Lord teaches us to prize it beyond liberty or life.

The force of our Lord's language goes further yet. Let me repeat the words and then enlarge upon them. "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" Holy Scripture is the transcript of the secret decree of God. We do not believe in fate, a blind, hard thing, but we believe in predestination, the settled purpose of a wise and loving Father. The Book of Fate is cruel reading, but the book of divine Fore-ordination is full of charming sentences, and those lines out of it which are written in the Scriptures we joyfully choose to have fulfilled. It is the will of our Father who is in heaven which settles the things which must be, and because of this we cheerfully yield ourselves up to predestination.

Once being assured that God has appointed it, we have no struggles. Nay, we will not even breathe a wish to have the matter otherwise. Let the will of the Father be the supreme law. It ought to be so. We find a depth of comfort in saying, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems him good." Now, the prophecies of Scripture were to the Lord Christ the revelation of the predestination of God so that it must be, and He cheerfully, joyfully, even without a prayer against it, gives Himself up at once to that which must be, because God has appointed it.

If any of you do not believe in the predestination of God, you will, probably, in some hour of depression, ascribe your sorrows to a cruel fate. The human mind, somehow or other, is driven at last to this decision, that some things are beyond the control of man and of his will, and that these are fixed by necessity. How much better to see that God has fixed them! There is the wheel revolving surely and unalterably. Would it not comfort you to believe that it is full of eyes, and that it is moving according to the settled purpose of the Lord? That man who says, "It is my Father's will" is the happy man. Predestination is as sure and as certain as fate, but there is at the back of it a living and loving personality, ordering all things. To this we cheerfully yield ourselves.

Beloved, let us value Scripture as much as Christ did. I was going to say, let us value it even more, for if our Lord valued unfulfilled Scripture—which was but a shell till He became its kernel—how much more should we value it, to whom the Scriptures are fulfilled in a large degree, because the Christ has suffered and has done even as it was written of Him by the prophets of God!

Time flies so quickly that I must pass on. You perceive that I have a pregnant text. It is full of living instruction to those who desire to learn. God help us to receive with joy all its holy teaching!

V. But I must come to the last point. We will consider OUR LORD'S LESSONS TO EACH ONE OF US in this text.

The first lesson is this—Desire no other forces for God's work than God Himself ordains to use. Do not desire that the government should come to your rescue to support your church. Do not desire that the charms of eloquence should be given to ministers, that they may therewith command listening ears, and so maintain the faith by the wisdom of words. Do not ask that learning and rank and prestige may come upon the side of Christianity, and so religion may become respectable and influential. Means that God has not chosen to use should not be looked upon by us with covetous eyes.

Has He not said, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts”? Jesus has all those squadrons of angels at His disposal—do you not wish that He would use them? What a glorious vision is before us as we see their serried ranks and mark their glittering splendor! But Jesus bids them stand still and see the salvation of God wrought out without their interposition. To them He has not put in subjection the new world. They must not meddle with the redemption of men.

The conflict for truth is to be a spiritual battle between man and the serpent—nothing but spiritual force is to be employed, and that not by angels, but by men. Man must overcome sin by spiritual means only. Put up the sword, Peter! Jesus does not want its keen edge. Keep your swords in your sheaths, you seraphim! Jesus does not want even your blades of celestial temper. His weakness has done more than human or angelic strength. His suffering and death have done the deed which all the hierarchy of angels could never have accomplished. The truth is to win the fight. The Spirit is to subdue the powers of evil.

Brethren, do not ask anybody else to interfere. Let us have this fight out on the ground which God has chosen. Let us know that God is omnipotent in the realm of mind and that by His truth and Spirit He will overcome. He holds back all forces other than those of argument, and persuasion, and enlightenment by His Spirit—do not let us even wish to put our hand to any force other than He ordains to use.

And next, take care that when other forces are within reach, you do not use them for the promotion of the heavenly kingdom. When you are in argument for the truth, do not grow angry, for this would be to fight the Lord’s battles with the devil’s weapons. Do not wish to oppress a person whose views are erroneous or even blasphemous. The use of bribes for the propagation of opinions is mean and the refusal of charities to those who differ from us in sentiment is detestable.

Let no threats escape your lip, or bribes pollute your hand. It is not thus that the battles of truth are to be fought. If you ever feel inclined to shut a man’s mouth by wishing him banishment, or sickness, or any sort of ill, be grieved with yourself that so unchristly a thought should have entered your head. Desire, only good for the most perverse of men. Fighting for Christ would be wounding Him sorely.

The French king heard of the cruelties perpetrated upon our Lord, and he exclaimed, “Oh, if I had been there with a troop of my guards, I would have cut the villains in pieces!” Yes, but Jesus did not want the King of France nor his guards. He came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. The Lord Jesus desires you, my brethren, to fight for Him by your faith, by your holy life, by your confidence in truth, by your reliance upon the Spirit of God, but whenever your hands begin to itch for the sword hilt, then may you hear Him say, “Put up your sword into its sheath.” He will conquer by love, and by love alone.

If at this present moment I could take this church and endow it with all the wealth of the Establishment, and gather into its midst all the wisdom and talent and eloquence which now adorns society, and if I could do this by one single prayer, I should long hesitate to offer the petition. These might prove idols, and provoke the living God to jealousy. Infinitely better for us to be poor and weak and devoid of that which is highly esteemed among men, and then to be baptized into the Holy Spirit, than to become strong and be left of our God.

We shall war this warfare with no unsanctified weapons, with no instrument other than God appoints. Speaking the truth in the power of the Spirit of God, we are not afraid of the result. Surely this is what Christ means, “I could pray to my Father and receive at once a bodyguard of angels, but I will do nothing of the kind, for by other means than these must My kingdom come.”

And the next lesson is—Never attempt to escape suffering at the expense of truth of God. “How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled?” Christ says, “I can escape being taken, and bound, and made a felon of, but then how are the Scriptures to be fulfilled?” Would you like to be throughout life screened from all afflictions? I think I hear a great many say, “I would.” Would you? Would you be always free from sickness, poverty, care, bereavement, slander, persecution? How, then, could that word be true, “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction”!

What would that text mean, “What son is he whom the Father chastens not”? Jesus said, “Except a man take up his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple.” Are you to be an exception to the rule? Oh, do not kick against suffering, for in so doing you may be fighting against God. When Peter drew his sword he was unconsciously fighting to prevent our redemption. When we struggle against tribulation or persecution we may be warring against untold benefit. Do you desire to ride through the world like princes? Do not desire such a dangerous fate, for how then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that the disciple is not above his Lord? Bow your spirit before the majesty of Scripture, and patiently endure all things for the elect’s sake.

Again, never tremble when force is on the wrong side. You see they are coming, Pharisees and priests, and the *posse comitatus* sent by the authorities to arrest the Savior, but He is not afraid. Why should He be? He could command twelve legions of angels to beat off the foe. The man who knows he has a reserve behind him may walk into an ambush without fear. The multitudes think that there stands before them a mere man, a feeble man, strangely red as with bloody sweat.

Ah! They know neither Him nor His Father. Let Him give a whistle, and from behind the olives of the grove, and from the walls of the garden, and from every stone of the Mount of Olives would spring up warriors mightier than those of Caesar, valiant ones, before whom armies would be consumed. One of these mighties of God slew of Sennacherib’s army, one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in a single night—another smote all the first-born of Egypt. Think, then, what more than twelve legions of them could accomplish!

Brethren, all these holy, heavenly beings are on our side. “Oh, but there are so many against us!” Yes I know there are, but more are they that are for us. All the myriads of heaven are our allies. See you not the legions waiting for the summons? Who wants to give the word of command till our great Commander-in-Chief decides that the hour is come? Let us patiently wait till He shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. Then will the reserves pour forth from heaven’s gate, and all the holy angels shall swell the pomp of the great appearing.

Till that moment, wait! In your patience possess your souls! The Lord Jesus waited. His angels waited. His Father waited. They are all still waiting. Heaven’s long-suffering still runs like a silver thread through the centuries. Jesus will come with His angels in all the glory of the Father, but dream not that He must come tomorrow or else be charged with being slack concerning His promise. Desire that He may come in your lifetime, and look for Him, but if He tarries be not dismayed. If He tarries for another century do not be weary, if another thousand years should intervene between us and the bright millennial day, yet stand you fast each man in his place, fearing nothing, but setting up your banners in the name of the Lord. “The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

We have no lack of strength. It is only that God wills that it be not put forth, and that our weakness for the present should be the instrument of His most majestic conquests. Lord, we are content to trust in You and wait patiently for You, but leave us not, we beseech You. Amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
LUKE 22:31-53; MATTHEW 26:47-54**

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—307, 291, 298

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.